THE AERONAUT.

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IN pursuance of the plan stated in a former number of the Aeronaut, we now proceed to present to our readers some account of the life and writings of SAPPHO.

Many have been the disputes of learned men in fixing the era of this celebrated poetess, and in determining who were her cotemporary poets. Without entering into any discussion, we shall briefly state the prominent facts of her life, as they are generally agreed upon. She was born about six hundred

years before Christ, in Mytelene, a town of the island Lesbos. She was married & had one daughter, named Cleis; but her husband dying, she seems to have given herself up to the indulgence of those tender passions which breathe through all her writings. Beautiful and fascinating both in mental acquirements and in personal charms, she attracted a numerous train of admirers; amongst whom the critics with a natural but romantic desire of associating so many minstrels of old, have numbered Anacreon, Alcaeus, & several other poets. How far this is true, we shall not pretend to determine; although our opinion inclines us to suppose the contrary. In like manner the mode of her death is doubtful; it being uncertain whether it was the poetess, or another female of the same name, who threw herself from the Leucatian promontory.

Amorous to an excess, and guided only by those strong emotions of love, which urge the possessor on to deeds and thoughts difficult to be restrained and ungovernable in their modes of

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Note; that the particular female friends of S., were Gyrinno, Atthis & Anactoria; her enemies were Gorgo and Andromeda.

operation, her writings are full of those wild bursts of passion, and those exclamations of violent feeling, which betoken a soul, as a modern poet has expressed it, 'drunk with love.' The lovely but wanton poetess is displayed in every line. There is no part of her few fragments which can be adduced as any evidence of a heart at ease. In those where we might suppose no passion existed, there is yet a luxuriance of imagery and sentiment totally incompatible with a chaste and sober mind. The master passion of her soul stamps its image on every note of her lyre. To this all her faculties, all her genius, all her writings are directed. The ravings of her turbulent heart threw their maddening shade over those productions which entitled her to the enthusiastic appellation of the tenth muse, by her countrymen. But though her poems are entirely built upon love, they are of a higher order than the sickly sensuality of anacreon, or the more disgusting details of later

Catullus borrowed largely from Sappho and Horace has frequently imitated her.

poets. She stands unrivalled in the department she has undertaken, and must be considered as a remarkable example, how strong emotion administers to the fire of genius, and tinctures every production with its own prominent characteristics. She is said to have written a great variety of poetry on other subjects; - but though they are now lost, we would not be afraid to hazard the conjecture, that they were all impressed with the same strain of feeling which is evident in the fragments that remain.

Upwards of one hundred of these fragments are now before us, which the industry of editors has collected from various works. Many of them however consist but of a line, or a part of a line; the allusions are so dark, & the connection is entirely lost, that we shall only offer to the perusal of our readers a selection of the most interesting.

We omit the Ode to Venus, and the Ode To a girl beloved, because they have been already long familiar to

most readers by several elegant translations, particularly the celebrated one of the last ode, by Ambrose Phillips,—('Blest as the immortal gods is he,—') to which we may now add the chaste & classical version of both these pieces by Charles Abraham Elton. We therefore proceed to the selection of the minor fragments; on which further remark is unnecessary, as it would only be a repetition of what has been already stated in general terms.

I.

Ἀστέρες μὲν ἀμπὶ καλὰν σελάναν
ἄπς ἀποκρύπτουτι φαεννὸν εἶδος,
ὁππόταν πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπῃ
γᾶν ——

The lovely moon that rides the sky
Hides each bright star that glitters by,
Lost in the glorious blaze that pours
Its beams o'er earth's illumin'd shores.

II.

Ἀμφὶ δ' ὕδωρ
* * * πυκρὸν κελαδεῖ δι' ὔσδων
μαλίνων· αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων
κῶμα καταρρέει.

Where glides the cooling water by
The winds along the branches sigh,
The falling leaves from slumber wake,
And thro' the solemn silence break.

III.

Κῆνον, ὦ χρυσόθρονε Μοῖσ', ἐνίσπες
ὕμνον, ἐκ τᾶς καλλιγύναικος ἑδρᾶς
Τηΐιος χωρας ὃν ἄειδε τερπνῶς
πρεσβὺς ἀγαυός.

Muse! upon thy golden throne,
wake that hymn's inspiring tone,
which the Teian minstrel sung
Bending o'er the harp he strung,
From that goodly region blest
with the fairest maids possest.

IV.

Ἔλθε, Κύπρι,
χρυσέαισιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἁβραῖς
συμμεμιγμένον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
οἰνοχοοῦσα
τοῖσδ' ἑταίροις τοῖσιν ἐμοῖς τε καὶ [σοῖς.

Come, queen of love! the banquet join,
From golden cups of heavenly wine
we pour the nectar's stream divine;
My friends be thine nor only mine.

V.

Κατθανοῦσα δὲ κεῖσ'· οὐδέποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν
ἔσσετ' οὐδέποτ' εἰς ὕστερον. οὐ γὰρ πεδέχεις
[βρόδων
τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας. ἀλλ' ἀφανὴς κὴν Ἄϊδα δόμοις
φοιτάσεις πεδ' ἀμαυρῶν νεκύων ἐκπεπταμένα.

Sleep there in death: no heart may cherish
Thy memory which in dust must perish;
Thy hand nèer snatch'd the blooming rose
Where bright Pièria's summit glows;

And now in death's sepulchral pleia
No eye thy lingering foot may trace,
None mark thee, in thy dusky shroud,
Burst from the ghosts' obscurer crowd.

VI.

Ἀλλά τις οὐκ ἔμμεν παλιγκότων ὀργάνων.
'αλλ' ἀβακὴν τὰν φρέν' ἔχω.

Yes – yes, I will be calm indeed –
Although this writhing heart must bleed.

VII.

Γλυκεῖα μᾶτερ, οὔτοι δύναμαι κρέκειν τὸν ἰστὸν,
πόθῳ δαμεῖσα παιδὸς, βραδινὰν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.

Sweet mother, nay – I cannot weave
The web – that youth has rais'd my fire,
And lovely Venus bids me leave
My labors, for my strong desire.

VIII.

Δέδυκε μὲν ἀ σελάνα καὶ Πληϊάδες· μέσαι δὲ
νύκτες· παρὰ δ' ἔρχετ' ὤρα· ἐγὼ δὲ μόνα καθεύδω.

The moon withdraws her trembling light
The Pleiads beam no longer bright,
Slow rolls the car of central night;
The hour has come – the hour has gone –
And I unblest – must lie alone.

IX.

Ἔστί μοι καλὰ παῖς χρυ-
σέοισιν ἀνθέμοισιν
ἐμφερὴ μορφὰν ἔχουσα,
Κλεῖς [μεν] ἀγαπατά·
ἀντὶ τᾶς ἐγὼ οὐδὲ Λυδί-
αν πᾶσαν, οὐδ' ἐραννάν.

Bright as the golden flowers, the form
of Cleïs breathes with beauties warm.
The cherished daughter of my love;
What mortal beauty half so fair?
What Lydian damsel shall compare
Her charms with those which Cleïs prove?

X.

Τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν κακόν· οἱ θεοὶ γὰρ οὕτω
κεκρίκασιν· ἀπέθνησκον γὰρ ἄν.

To die — to part with life, —
Yet, since the gods such doom decree,
This heart shall sink without a stripe,
Yielded to death all willingly.

XI.

Ὁ Ἔρως ἐτίναξε τας φρένας,
ὡς ἄνεμος κατ' ὄρος δρυσὶν ἐμπεσών.

As shakes the mountain oaks the roaring wind,
So love impetuous agitates the mind.

XII.

Ἔστι φύσις θηλεῖα, βρέφη σώζουσ' ὑπὸ κόλποις
Αὐτῆς· ταῦτα δ' ἄφωνα ἔοικε ἴστησι δεδωκὼς
Καὶ διὰ πόντιον οἶδμα καὶ ἠπείρου διὰ πάσης,
Οἷς ἐθέλει θνητῶν· τοῖς δ' οὐ παρέουσιν ἀκ-
ούειν
Ἔξεστιν, κωφὴν δ' ἀκοῆς αἴσθησιν ἔχουσιν.

There is a love, whose all delighting flame
Pervades and governs all the female frame;
The cherished infant knows its fostering care
Prest to the bosom of endearment there;

Though dumb its voice, yet lo! its tones awake,
And to the hardest breast at once can break,
Though the dark wastes of the rolling main
It bursts its way, & thro' the far-spanded plain;
The absent ear must listen to the sound,
Yea - even the deaf obey the voice profound!

The following inscriptions monumental inscriptions by Sappho have been preserved entire.

I.

Τῷ γριπεῖ Πελάγωνι πατὴρ ἀνέθηκε Μενίσκος
Κύρβιν καὶ κώπαν, μνᾶμα κακοζοΐας.

Memorials of the hardy life he bore
His sire Menisscus placed this net & oar;
The fisher Pelagon upon this shore
Entomb'd, shall tempt the dangerous deep no more.

II.

Τιμάδος ἅδε κόνις, τὰν δὴ, πρὸ γάμοιο θανοῖσαν,
Δέξατο Φερσεφόνας κυάνεος θάλαμος·
Ἃς καὶ ἀποφθιμένας πᾶσαι νεοθαγέϊ χαλκῷ
Ἄλικες ἱμερὰν κρατὸς ἔθεντο κόμαν.

The dust of Timas sleeps unconscious here,
Ere yet a bride, she slumbers on the bier,
No bridal flowers bedeck her living head,
She dwells in Proserpina's gloomy shade;
The dear companions of her former joy
Cut their bright locks, & strew them sorrowing
by. —

Such are the fragments of Sappho. It is rather a singular fact, that honored and esteemed as she undoubtedly was, according to the testimony of antiquity, so few of her productions remain; and those few only to be gleaned from a variety of writers who have occasionally quoted detached parts of her works. The reputation which she acquired, should it would seem have at least ensured some degree of perpetuity to the labors of her mind. They must have perished in the decline of the Roman empire, as several books were extant in the time of Horace. We are only left to a partial judgment of her genius by the few reliques which we have; we must take much for granted. It is not impossible, that her other works would not have equalled our present ideas; that the splendor of her beauty, & the warmth of her passions, procured much of her renown; and that those productions, in which love was not the principal feature, were devoid of all that energy and

fire, which distinguished her other writings. But upon the other hand, her few amatory pieces could not have entitled her to her unbounded applause, had not her other writings corresponded to them. All men are not passionate lovers; and had there not been genius, taste, and feeling, in all her poems, she could not have been honored as she was.

Upon the whole therefore, we may conclude that Sappho was a woman of a high order of genius; that her lyre followed its guiding energy; that her affections and her passions, were strong and often ungovernable, often degenerating into lasciviousness, and often, if we may so speak of a passion, unhallowed when carried too far, sublime and dazzling in their course. How far we may have reason to regret the loss of her writings, is a question, which it is unnecessary

at present to discuss; — but we are compelled to say, that however we reverence her genius, and admire the flights of her poetry, we can but pity, we will not say despise, a character whose life was one continued scene of abandonment to the escapes of passion, sometimes criminal, always unbounded.

E.